

COMBINED WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES SESSION

PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION PERSONNEL SELECTION AND TRAINING PROGRAM

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As early as 1931 the Pennsylvania Game Commission clearly recognized the fact that it is fundamentally wrong to give a man a book, a badge and a gun and expect him to intelligently enforce laws and perform other duties required of his office without specialized training to fit him for these tasks.

The first steps were taken in Pennsylvania in 1932 with the inauguration of an in-service training program. Successive classes were held for two weeks each until the entire field personnel was absorbed.

At the outset some opposition was voiced by older members of the force who could not quite reconcile the necessity, at their age, of "going to school," particularly when they were post-graduates of the school of hard knocks. Of this limited number, a few recognized that they would have taken less raps over the knuckles, with fewer aches and pains, had they been afforded even limited formal training when they joined the service.

The majority seized the advantage vigorously. The Commission, cognizant of its effectiveness, in 1936 fixed the policy in the selection of its future field officers. Thus was established the first school of its kind in the United States, perhaps in the world. Since that time, no officer has entered the salaried field service without having successfully completed the prescribed course of study. To date, seven classes have been graduated comprising one hundred sixty-nine Pennsylvanians and three additional students for sister states (two, North Carolina — one, Washington).

Lacking satisfactory candidates, the School was inoperative during the war years. It currently operates on an actual need basis, preferable to an annual basis for economical reasons. Small classes are costly to train.

Graduate students are assigned to field districts on a one-year probationary basis, subject to dismissal for failure to measure up to the Commission's requirements in all respects.

Applications are accepted state-wide from those eligibles able to meet the preliminary qualifications. These undergo written mental tests and oral interviews, as well as rigid physical and moral investigations until those of highest standing have been selected in numbers sufficient to meet the Commission's enrollment requirements.

The acceptance of the policy and response to the training program has been unbelievably astonishing; the results most gratifying. Illustrating the response point, more than four hundred ninety applicants, many of whom were trained wildlife specialists, other holding general college degrees, sought enrollment in one class of twenty-seven members.

The demands made upon every wildlife conservation commission today call for healthy, vigorous men, capable of promptly and intelligently executing the commission's programs in an efficient, courteous and impartial manner.

How shall we go about selecting such personnel? The basic qualifications of residence requirements; minimum and maximum age, height and weight limitations; physical, vision and personal requirements are most essential. These and all other requirements ought to be reasonably standardized and rigid, for the men to be selected are the very backbone of the organization. They are the commission's direct representatives with the hunter, the farmer and a host of others with whom they come into daily contact. Secondary are such matters as rates of compensation while undergoing training, the type and scope of both written tests and oral interviews and other requirements all pointing to final selection.

Once having selected the personnel to either fill the ranks in the existing field force, or in the selection of an entire field organization, the training program is of vital importance.

The length of the course of instruction will largely be determined by a number of factors: budgetary allowances and the advisability and length of interspersed classroom instruction and field application at seasonal periods of the year, the later principle having been successfully employed in Pennsylvania. Many of the states are varying from brief two and three day in-service training programs, to a full year's training for new recruits.

Curriculum will also be determined by the amount of available time, the importance of stressing major programs and the desirability of included related courses. For example, the ten-month course of instruction completed in Pennsylvania in the Spring of 1952 included as major subjects biology, firearms, fish, game, Commission policies and activities, land, law, legal procedure, ornithology, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, police sciences, predators, control and study, public relations, research and specialized instruction totaling nearly nine hundred seventy-five institutional hours. Of the total training period, approximately sixty percent of the time was devoted to classroom instruction; forty percent in field application and observation.

Instructors numbered fifty-four of whom forty-two were Commission affiliated; twelve were non-Commission affiliated; each a well trained specialist in his field and a capable teacher.

The selection of a superintendent should have careful consideration. His is a huge task to plan and integrate the various instructors and programs, supervise the selection and variation of wholesome food and see that it is properly prepared. Here let me inject a worthwhile hint. The quality and quantity of the food served will immeasurably affect the success of the program. A good, economical chef is an indispensable asset; a poor one worse than none at all. Men, well fed, are happy men.

Sanitation and the health and happiness of each student is his constant problem. Economy of operation is essential, too. He must see that every cog in the machinery functions smoothly and meet emergencies promptly and effectively as they arise.

How much would such a program cost? That is indeed a difficult question to answer because of the number and variety of contributing factors. Capital investments in the training plant, salaries and traveling expenses of staff and students, operational costs such as labor, dishes, towels, bedding, sheets, pillow

cases, and a score of other items must be considered in the final cost. Whether the school will be of a permanent character, or used only periodically will likewise affect the cost of the program. The fluctuations in community labor costs will similarly increase or decrease the operational figure. The number of trainees in each class is reflected in cost data. Experiences has taught us that a class of twenty-five students can be trained at only a slight increase in cost in comparison with a class of twenty. The same facilities, labor and instructors remain fixed; the added cost being a slightly negligible increase in food requirements. Student compensation and traveling expenses comprise the major increases in the comparison. The actual number of students graduated when compared with the number matriculated is reflected in the training cost. (Note: The cost of training each student in the 1951 class — 17 enrolled — 12 graduated — including capital items, was \$4,448.25).

Is the investment worth while? Emphatically, yes. The investment in a trained officer can be measured in dollars and cents, but his value to the commission whom he represents is incalculable. The service standards required in the highly specialized wildlife field today are much higher than those of ten years ago and are increasing daily. The public demands courteous treatment even though an arrest for a law violation is imminent. The officer must know the background of the law he intends to enforce, how to enforce it intelligently, what constitutes evidence and how to perfect the prosecution with the least amount of criticism. Perhaps he is called upon to protect his life in the enforcement of the law. He must know his legal rights in such instances and how to meet force with equal, but non-excessive force. He must be firm — but a diplomat; a credit to the organization he serves, symbolic in the uniform he wears.

The principal of the public schools is anxious to arrange a conservation program which will involve nature studies, motion pictures and talks. The trained game protector meets the task with equanimity. Service clubs demand similar services.

The farmer asks for planning assistance that will enhance the wildlife crop on his farm, the game propagator needs help in raising ringnecked pheasants on the cooperative plan; the wildlife columnist needs statistical or other data for his column. Questions on research, open seasons and bag limits, hunting license costs and procurement, predator control and an inestimable number of others are put to the game protector daily. At day's end he has a variety of complicated reports to make to the commission, that they may have the benefit of his knowledge of local conditions. His is a full day.

Unless he receives training in these multiple problems he cannot successfully cope with them. There are no national or local schools where he can acquire this knowledge except those sponsored or operated by the State Wildlife Conservation Agencies.

There is another factor not to be overlooked in measuring the value of pre-employment training. Most of the men entering this field today are sincere in their chosen avocation. This means less personnel turnover.

It is gratifying to observe the progress in this direction. A recent national survey, if my recollection is correct, indicated that better than sixty percent of the states are engaging in training programs of some character and that a high percentage of the remainder are contemplating similar plans on a variety of scales. These figures alone should convince even the most skeptical.

Yes, carefully selected manpower, coupled with intensive and well-planned training programs, does pay huge continuing dividends in the wildlife conservation plans of today and tomorrow.